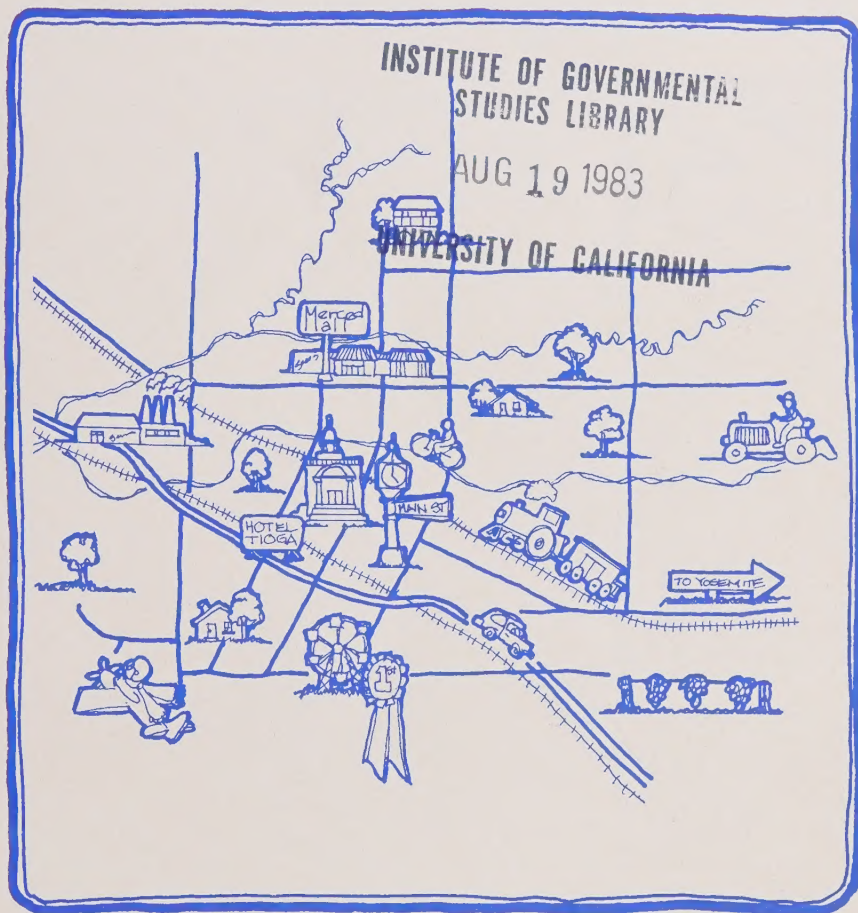


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# SUMMARY OF



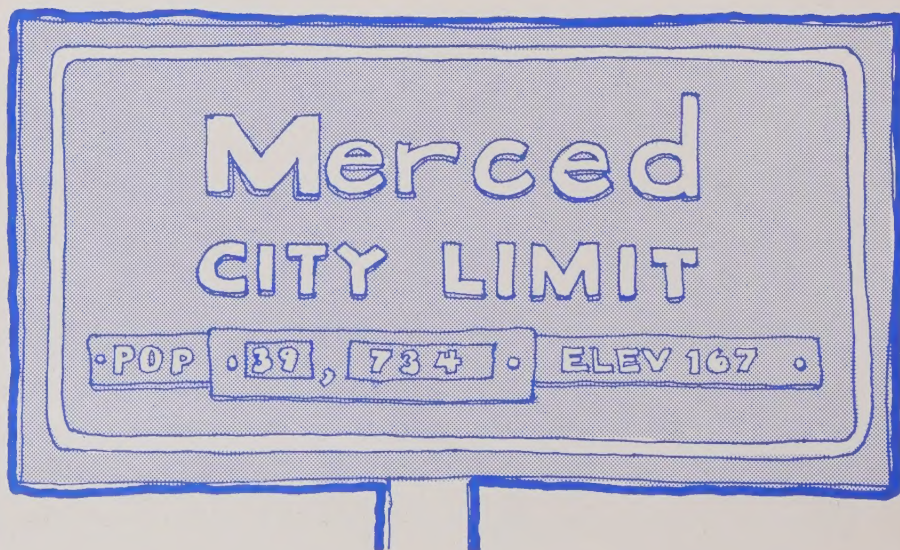
# MERCED CITY'S GENERAL PLAN



# Q. A. L. D. S. W. I. T. H.

Most people who live here agree that Merced's a special place. Located in the San Joaquin Valley, it's only about 125 miles southeast of San Francisco and just 80 miles from Yosemite. It is the Merced County seat, as well as the retail commercial center for the surrounding region. Agriculture and related commerce are a large percentage of the local economy. Castle Air Force Base, just northwest of the city, also adds substantially to the area's economy. Merced's 1982 population is approximately 40,000.

But, what makes Merced special? Is it the compact size, the small-town feeling, surrounding agricultural land, the parks and historical structures, the downtown, the beautiful tree-lined streets, the creekside bikeways? It's all of them and more. These things didn't just happen. They are the result of much effort on the part of concerned citizens, and appointed and elected city officials. These people looked at what the city was and decided what they wanted it to become. This is **PLANNING** -- and what Merced's General Plan is all about.





# SOME BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

Before getting into city goals, some basic assumptions about planning and the city need to be made. These assumptions are:

1.

**Planning is important.** Life in Merced can be improved by public participation in the planning process.

2.

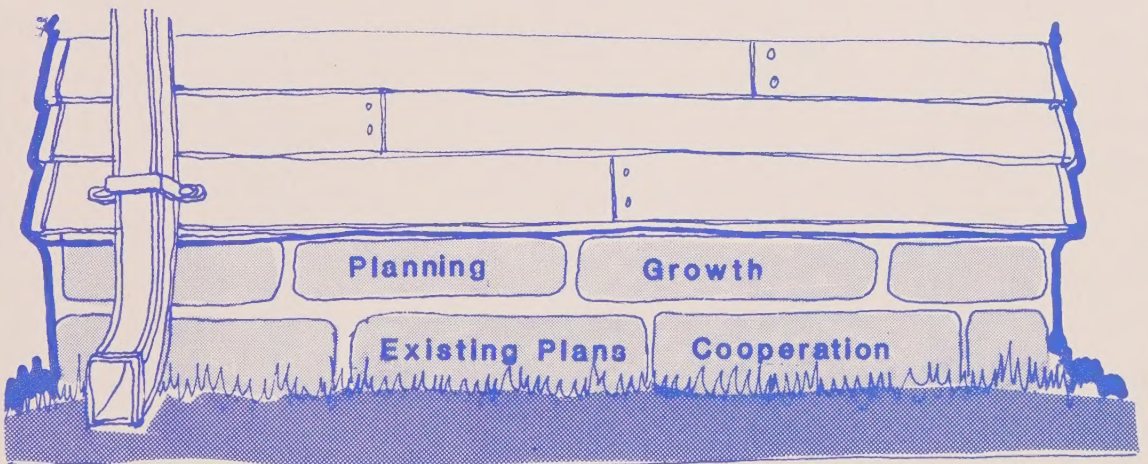
**Growth can be good.** Therefore, Merced will continue to accommodate new development, but will manage the location, timing and quality of this growth.

3.

**We're on the right track.** Many existing plans and programs are incorporated into the plan.

4.

**Cooperation's the key.** Merced City and County will continue to work together to guide future development.



# MAIN IDEAS

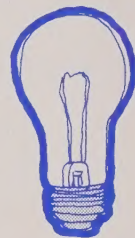
Like most general plans, Merced's General Plan talks about growth, housing, jobs, businesses, and what can move in next door. Incorporated into the general plan text and maps are two very important ideas:



The City will continue to encourage orderly, quality growth; and



The City will preserve surrounding agricultural land.



## HOW IT WORKS

The City's plan to make these ideas work is threefold:

1.

It encourages development or "filling in" of vacant land surrounded by existing development.

2.

It encourages higher densities in appropriate locations --thus, saving land and making city services more efficient.

3.

It directs growth to the north and south of the city --to areas made up of soils which are generally not good for agriculture.





# DEFINITIONS

**Planning** Looking at what a city is, deciding what it wants to be, and developing policies and programs to make these things happen (or keep them happening).

**General Plan** Outlines the goals of a community and suggests methods of making them happen. It consists of a text which discusses the policies and related maps which indicate what should go where. Copies of both text and maps are available from the Planning Department.

# QUESTIONS

Do city plans really address the concerns of the people who live here?

Hopefully, yes. The City sought citizens' comments while preparing the General Plan; a citizens advisory committee helped draft the plan; a summary of the draft plan was distributed; information sessions on the plan were held; and public hearings were conducted by both the Planning Commission and City Council before final adoption.

Many people worked on the General Plan. Can it be changed any time?

Yes, but the City has chosen to limit revising the General Plan to only three times per year. That way, the City (including concerned citizens) can look at trends rather than individual projects.

Won't the General Plan rapidly become out of date just like previously adopted plans?

No. The Plan specifically states that it should be reviewed and updated annually.

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Land use is just like it sounds -- how land is used. It's probably the most important issue a city has to consider because it affects so many things -- the natural environment, residential neighborhoods, business districts, streets, parks and public services.

The General Plan identifies how land is presently used and proposes how it might be developed. Land use is discussed specifically in the Urban Expansion chapter of the General Plan, but the policies are included throughout the document. A land use map utilizes city policies to indicate what uses should go where.

**GOAL:** Use land efficiently and thereby preserve surrounding agricultural land.



Require urban development to be within the SUDP (Specific Urban Development Plan) boundary and next to existing urban areas.



Encourage in-fill development.



Direct growth north and south of the city away from prime agricultural soils to the east and west.



Provide sewer/water lines only to areas within the SUDP area.

**Annexation requests should be:**





# DEFINITIONS

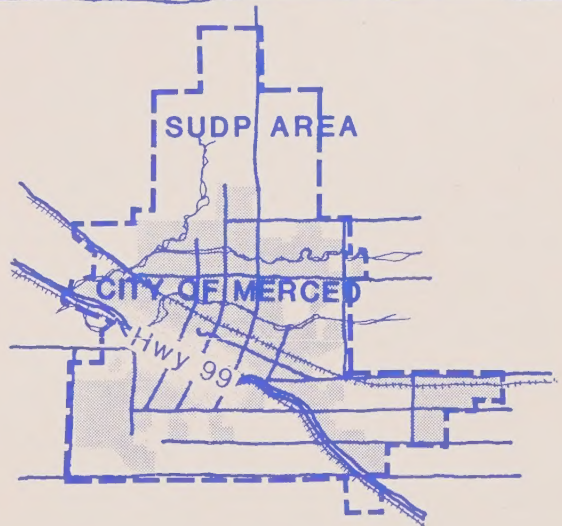
**In-Fill Development** The development or "filling in" of vacant land surrounded by existing development. Encouraging in-fill development is very important if the city is serious about efficient, orderly growth and the preservation of surrounding agricultural land.

**SUDP (Specific Urban Development Plan) Area** An area, agreed upon by the City and County, that will eventually be developed with urban uses in the city. Those sites outside the area known as the SUDP will remain as rural residential (low density) uses or as permanent agricultural land.

# QUESTION

Can the Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP) boundary be changed?

Yes. However, to change the boundary, both the Merced County and Merced City General Plans must be amended. Both the City and County feel that they should work together to guide growth in a timely, orderly manner. Great care should be taken in deciding to amend the Specific Urban Development Plan Area.



# NATURAL SETTING

Natural setting refers to the physical environment -- local, regional and statewide. In these days of diminishing resources, it becomes more and more important to examine our natural resources and develop policies and programs for their protection, conservation and enhancement. Natural setting is discussed in chapter three of the general plan document and illustrated on the Open Space Map.

**GOAL:** Protect and manage our natural assets.



Develop programs to protect scenic corridors.



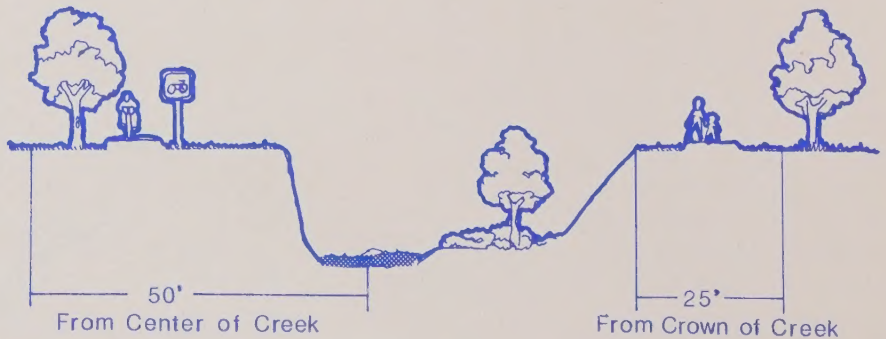
Maintain creeks and streams in their natural state.



Acquire adequate space along creeks for creekside open space.



Preserve significant stands of trees.



**CREEKSIDE DEDICATION REQUIREMENTS**



# DEFINITIONS

**Open Space Map** One of the official general plan maps which illustrates the policies and programs outlined in the general plan document. It designates scenic routes/scenic corridors, locates school and park sites, and identifies creekside open space and bikeways.

**Scenic Corridors** Special areas of the city, identified on the Open Space Map, which add to the beauty of our town. For example, Bear Creek Drive is a scenic corridor.

# QUESTION

Does the City consider how development will affect the natural environment?

Yes. The City looks at the possible effects on the environment of every project proposed: If the impacts could be significant, an environmental impact report (EIR) is prepared. An EIR looks at how the project will affect the environment, suggests ways to lessen the negative effects, proposes alternatives to the project, and allows for public comment.







Housing refers to the places people live -- the homes themselves and where they are located. For most communities, housing is an important and complex issue. In developing housing policies, cities must look at location, population characteristics, building trends and vacancy rates. Housing is discussed in the Residential Environment chapter of the General Plan and in a separate document called the Housing Element (also available at the City Planning Department).

**GOAL:** Provide for a variety of safe and adequate homes and neighborhoods.



Designate areas for multi-family housing that are:

-  Along major streets for convenient access (but NOT as a buffer);
-  On designated in-fill sites;
-  Adjacent to parks, shops and services;
-  Towards the center of the city (versus near permanent agricultural lands).







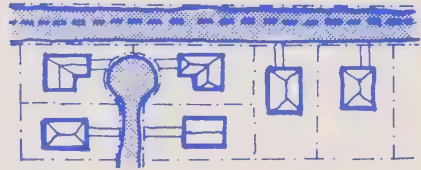
Designate areas for single-family homes that are:



Designed to reduce the impacts from busy streets, commercial and industrial uses;



Towards the outskirts of the city (versus having higher densities there).



**Like This**  
On an open end  
cul de sac

**Not This**  
Fronting on a  
busy street



Preserve older residential neighborhoods and homes.



Establish programs to reduce housing costs.



Continue existing Housing Rehabilitation Program.



# DEFINITION

**Housing Rehabilitation Program** A program which identifies unsafe housing or housing units in poor condition and provides low interest loans to qualified owners to make necessary repairs.

# BUSINESS & INDUSTRY

Business and industry refers to the businesses and industries which make up the local economy. In Merced they are, for the most part, either service/retail commercial, agriculture related, or governmental. With this in mind, the City sets goals and outlines a clear set of policies to guide decisions on commercial and industrial development. Business and industry are discussed in the Economic Environment chapter of the general plan document.

**GOAL:** Develop a strong economy that will provide jobs and services for the people of Merced.



Encourage major commercial development in or near existing designated centers.



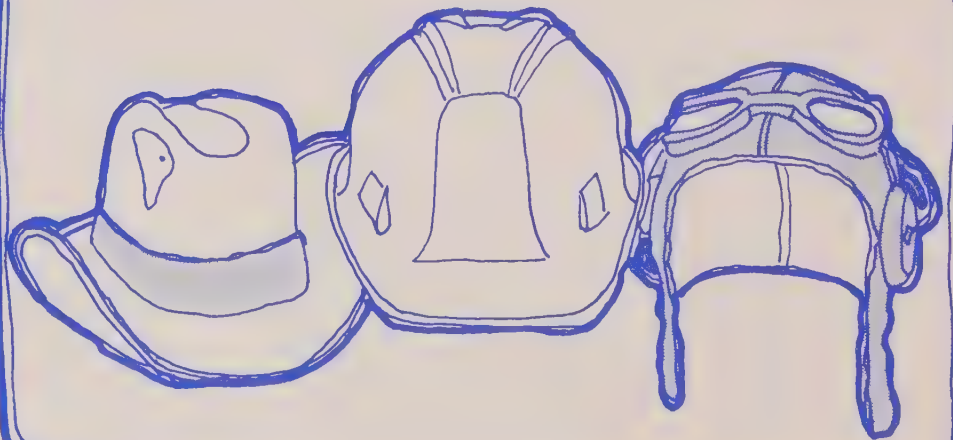
Develop a system of small neighborhood commercial centers.



Try to attract new industries and retain existing ones.



Provide adequate space for offices.



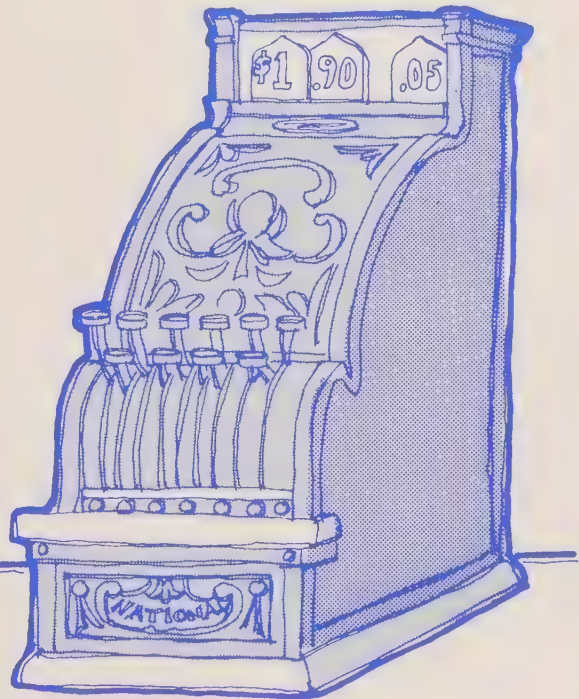


# QUESTION

Why group all the regional commercial development either downtown, near the mall, or at the new location in Southeast Merced?

For several reasons it's very important to keep regional commercial development grouped together. In light of the City's goals of preserving surrounding agricultural land and promoting efficient land use, it seems sensible to consolidate the major commercial centers in two or three places. For when many scattered commercial centers are allowed, haphazard development often occurs. Fresno is a prime example. This would probably destroy some of the things that make Merced special -- its compact size and small-town feeling.

Secondly, consolidating major commercial uses makes sense economically. New businesses may complement older, established centers. Shoppers can comparison shop and save time and money. The City has a significant investment in maintaining and promoting its existing commercial centers, particularly downtown. Finally, it's cheaper for the City to service a few large commercial centers than many small ones.



# TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is concerned with the best way to move both people and goods. There are many different methods of movement: walking, bicycling, driving a car, or taking public transit. These methods may complement or conflict with one another. With this in mind, the General Plan tries to develop policies and programs which support a variety of transportation methods. Transportation is discussed in the Transportation and Circulation chapter and illustrated on the Circulation Map of the General Plan.

**GOAL:** Create a safe, efficient and balanced system of transportation facilities to serve the needs of all citizens.



Develop a hierarchy of streets that helps:



Clarify major routes



Control access onto major streets



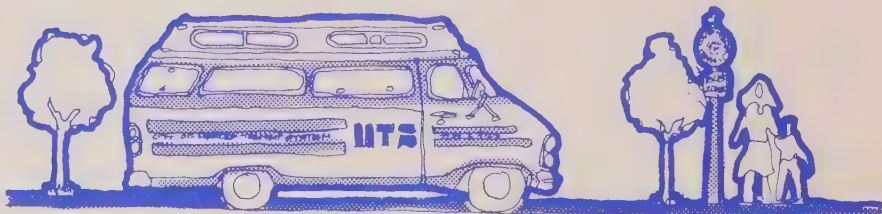
Establish appropriate street improvements



Synchronize traffic signals



Encourage the use of alternative transportation methods: walking, bicycling and taking public transit.





# DEFINITION

**Circulation Map** One of the official general plan maps that classifies streets and other forms of transportation and illustrates the policies outlined in the General Plan text.

# QUESTIONS

If the street I live on is designated "expressway" or "major street," how will it affect me?

When a street is designated "expressway" or "major street," there's a good possibility that the street will be changed in some way. The street might be widened, more traffic lanes added, parking restricted, or traffic signals installed at major intersections. These "improvements" would probably increase both the speed and the number of automobiles. Often such changes are not very pleasant for residential neighborhoods. Therefore, the City has tried to plan in advance where expressways or major streets will be located in areas of residential development in order for home buyers to be able to anticipate such changes.



How does the City feel about bike paths?

The City feels that bicycles are a basic means of transportation and recreation. It has planned for numerous bicycle facilities. Presently, there are approximately 20 miles of bike paths within the city. However, a total of about 113 miles of bicycle paths are proposed, 29 miles of which will be off-street and 84 miles being on-street. The County has similar plans for developments on the fringe of the city.

# CITY SERVICES

City services refers to the services the City provides to the people and businesses in Merced. They include things like water service, sewage treatment, police and fire protection, refuse collection, recreation and cultural activities. These services are extremely important planning issues. If an area can't be serviced by city sewer lines or protected by the fire department, it should either pay to extend the necessary services, wait to develop until the services are available, or not develop.

City services are discussed in the Public Facilities chapter of the General Plan. City services are designated on the General Plan Land Use Map as public/government facilities, park, open space, recreation facilities and schools.

**GOAL:** Protect the health, safety and welfare of Merced's residents by providing the necessary city services.



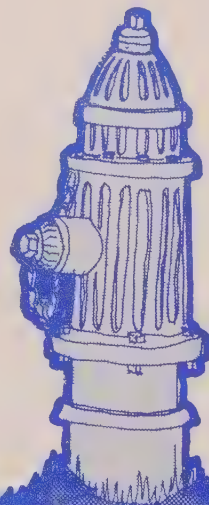
Develop public facility master plans.



Design city service systems to serve the SUDP area.



Require the developer or user to pay for new city services that are needed to accommodate their development.





# DEFINITION

**Public Facility Master Plans** Documents that look at existing needs and facilities, and project future demand for new facilities. The wastewater master plan is an example of such a document.

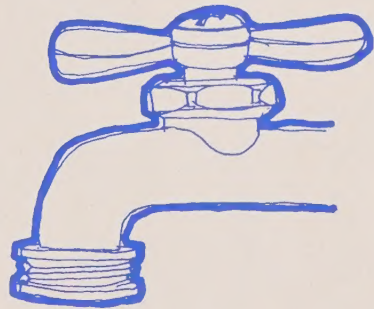
# QUESTIONS

In the future, will North Merced be adequately serviced by existing sewer service?

A plan for providing sewer service to North Merced has been approved. The method to pay for the plan is being studied and, with continued diligence, the uses indicated on the General Plan Map can be served.

Does new development pay for itself?

That's the idea. When an area is subdivided, a developer is required to install streets, lights, sewer lines and water lines, and all the other necessary public improvements as the development is constructed.



In addition, the City has decided to use CRIS (Cost Revenue Impact System). CRIS is a computer program that reviews development proposals and evaluates the demand they would place on public services. CRIS projects costs and revenues development proposals will have. The City can then determine what fees a new project will have to pay, if any, to insure adequate city services.

# CITY IMAGE

City image refers to how the city looks -- the community as a whole, separate neighborhoods and individual projects. City image is an important factor for any community to consider. If a community looks good, the city not only becomes a more livable place but often receives direct economic benefits. Merchants do better, property values increase, new tax revenues are generated, and quality companies are interested in locating there. City image is explained in the Urban Design chapter of the General Plan.

**GOAL:** Improve the design and appearance of the community.



Create development standards for gateways and major corridors.



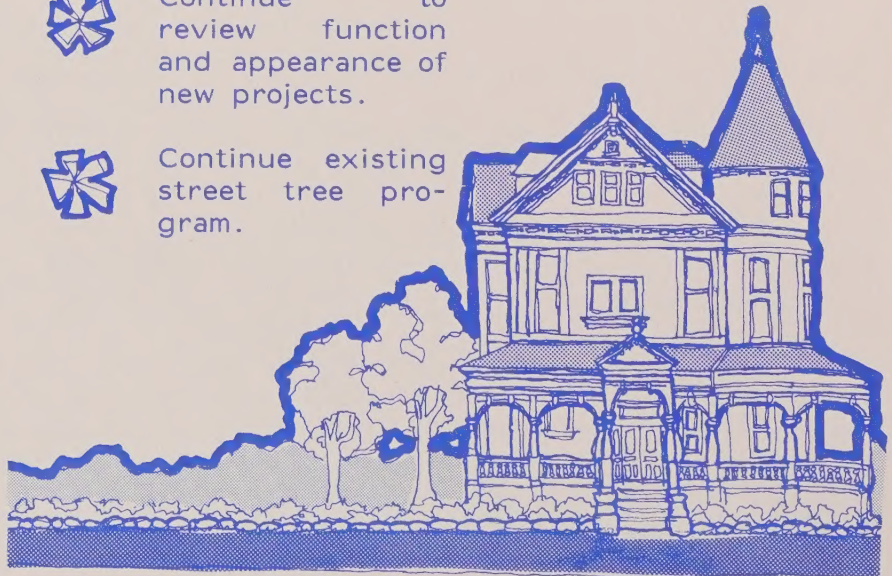
Identify community assets and develop ways to preserve and improve them.



Continue to review function and appearance of new projects.



Continue existing street tree program.





# DEFINITIONS

**Development Standards** City standards involving architecture, signing, landscaping and site planning.

**Gateways** Entrances to the city along major streets, freeways, railways and at the airport. Gateways are very important because they are a visitor's initial and often only impression of the city.

**Street Tree Program** A city program of maintaining street trees. It includes: disease control, replacement and pruning. Because of this program, Merced has been awarded the title, "Tree City, U.S.A."





# USING THE PLAN

So, after all this planning, how do we make it **WORK?**

The City uses several ways to carry out its general plan. Decision makers refer to the general plan when reviewing development proposals and making decisions on the budget. However, the most important planning tool is the City's zoning ordinance. It regulates how land can be used.

But, what's the difference between the General Plan Land Use Map and the Zoning Map? Why does the City need both?

The General Plan Land Use Map generally designates land use and its approximate intensity. For example, residential is the land use and single-family is the density. It is the **PLAN** for the city. The Zoning Map, however, is a great deal more specific. It regulates land use, lot coverage, height of buildings and parking requirements. It is the **LAW**. . Zoning is based on the ideas developed in the general plan document and indicated on the Land Use Map.

# CONCLUSION

This is what Merced is planning for the future -- where it's headed and how to get there. However, this plan is not cast in concrete. It is intended to be flexible and to reflect the changing needs of the community. To do this, everyone's continued interest and support are needed. Merced's a very special place and keeping it that way takes a lot of effort on everyone's part.

**Remember, it doesn't just happen!**

For more information contact the Merced City Planning Department

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